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# Moscow Denies a Plot on the Pope as 'Absurd'

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MOSCOW, Dec. 18 — The Soviet Union issued a statement today strongly denying that there had been any complicity by Moscow in the attempt to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

The statement also dismissed Western speculation on the matter as "a campaign totally steeped in lies."

The three-paragraph item was unusual in that it carried the heading "statement" but gave no attribution to the Government, as is usually the case with such declarations. But its importance was indicated by its appearance in today's issues of Izvestia and Pravda, the principal Government and party newspapers, and by its appearance three times in 24 hours on the English-language service of the official press agency Tass.

The statement gave Soviet readers none of the background against which Western speculation about the assassination attempt has developed. Suggestions of possible Soviet involvement were made by officials in Italy and elsewhere after the Italian authorities began investigating reports that implicated a number of people from Bulgaria, perhaps the Soviet Union's most

faithful ally in the Eastern bloc.

"Absurd insinuations that some socialist countries are involved in the attempt made on the life of Pope John Paul II in May of last year have been circulated in a number of Western states lately," the statement said. "This campaign, totally steeped in lies, is spearheaded against Bulgaria. Foul nods are made from time to time also in the direction of the Soviet Union."

"Such statements should be ignored in general," the statement said, but then alluded to one reason why the suggestion of a Soviet connection had prompted such an authoritative and emphatic rejection — the danger that the allegations might incite new trouble in Poland, the Pope's native country.

"Attempts are being made to speculate on the feelings of trusting people, in particular believers," the statement said. It offered no elaboration, but Soviet citizens are generally well aware that the overwhelming majority of Poles are Roman Catholics and that Pope John Paul is a Pole.

Another reason for the unusual insistence with which the denial was issued — it is rare for Tass to repeat any item three times — appeared to be that the new Soviet party leader, Yuri V. Andropov, was head of the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence agency, at the time of the attempt on the Pope's life.

Most of the speculation on Bulgarian and Soviet involvement in the attempt has focused on the K.G.B., which has a history of participation in attempts to discredit and, on occasion, to kill individuals outside the Soviet Union who were considered a threat. In Rome, those favoring the theory of a plot have even speculated that the Italian authorities' interest in the Bulgarian connection may have derived from leaks by opponents of Mr. Andropov within the Soviet Union who would like to see him compromised in the affair.

Perhaps more than any of its counterparts in the Soviet bloc, the Bulgarian secret police operates as an adjunct of the K.G.B. Theories linking the K.G.B. to a conspiracy began spreading after a Bulgarian airline employee was arrested in Rome on suspicion of complicity with Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turk convicted of shooting the Pope. The Italians are also seeking other Bulgarians, including two diplomats who returned home recently.

The Soviet statement today said that the United States had fomented the speculation in an effort to cover up its own complicity in violence at home and in allied countries. The statement also said that such attempts were meant to divert attention from Western military preparations against the Soviet Union.

"Facts show that the dirty tracks of this provocation are leading to those who support repressive regimes like those in Chile or El Salvador, who patronize the Israeli aggressors and terrorists, who are accustomed to daily manifestations of violence in their own country," the statement said.

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